

Module 1 Part 1: Project Statement

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Project Statement

Clients

University of Idaho Division of Distance, and Extended Education (DEE).

Problem

New online instructors at the University of Idaho need targeted just-in-time (JIT) education that provides tools and strategies to improve their online courses and the learner experience presented in a flexible, focused, and time efficient format.

History

The University of Idaho was established in 1889 and is one of only 72 land grant universities in the nation. The University of Idaho is fully accredited and currently provides education for 11,780 post-secondary full-time and part-time students (University of Idaho, 2017). The University of Idaho has extension campuses in four locations across Idaho where traditional campus based courses are offered. In order to reach a greater number of learners, the University of Idaho is slowly implementing a distance education model. Instructors are encouraged to convert existing courses into a distance learning format to provide more options for non-traditional learners and increase enrollment at the institution. University of Idaho President Staben has expressed the need for expanding non-traditional learning models. “Some students want to come to the satellite campus, some will always want to come to Moscow, some will prefer distance learning, some online education and some will want a hybrid — really, we kind of have to meet students where the demand is, to some extent” (Johnson, 2014).

The University of Idaho Division of Distance and Extended Education (DEE) is a post-secondary educational program. DEE’s mission is to, “...design and create web-based classes for the Blackboard Learn course management system and offers training and workshops for faculty

looking to expand their use of online teaching resources.” DEE is also, “committed to offering quality, innovative, and student-centered courses and programs in which students and instructors participate in interactive and engaging learning activities that leverage Web-based technologies to achieve program and university learning objectives” (University of Idaho, 2016). The learners who are comprised of online instructors, need options for self-education on the subject of distance learning. Part of the DEE mission is providing support and training for online instructors. Providing those services in a timely and efficient manner is the focus of this proposed course.

Instructional Context

A few instructors are open to the idea of teaching online courses but find that there is a learning curve to facilitating an online course. Instructors also discover that finding the time to improve a course is difficult. At the University of Idaho, instructors are responsible for the course creation and content, administration, and maintenance of their online courses. University Administrations have expectations that, “...reflect a belief that teaching online is not much different from teaching in a face-to-face environment. This is not the case. Teachers who are effective in the face-to-face environment will be effective as online teachers, but it is not automatic and it will not happen overnight” (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010, p. 3). Other instructors may be resistant to the idea that their traditional classroom course may not translate to the online environment without significant alteration. In those situations, distance learning courses at the University of Idaho are created as exact duplicates of the traditional classroom version. The instructional designers at the University of Idaho DEE program assist the instructor in moving their courses initially to the online environment without changes. Knowing that the converted courses will require a redesign in the future, the DEE staff use this initial process as a basis for

establishing trust and a working relationship with the instructor. The instructors in these situations are new to the task of online facilitation and overwhelmed by the task of course improvement.

Once an online course is live and taught at least once, the instructors are usually more open to considering strategies for improvement and suggestions for managing online course. The proposed online course is expected to alleviate some of the questions and issues that new online instructors encounter. The focus of the proposed instructional module is improving the distance learning experience for both the instructor and student by providing tools for the online instructor, creating a meaningful online learning experience, and improving student engagement in a short, flexible online course.

Discussion

The targeted learner for this course which is comprised of University of Idaho instructors dictates that it be an asynchronous fully online course. This will provide flexibility for the instructors as they find themselves ready to consider improvements to their individual online courses. The course will need to acknowledge the educational level of the learner base by providing real-world strategies with supporting research that can be easily implemented by the instructor into their individual courses. The material content and writing style needs to be geared towards the audience level and meet the identified needs of the learner. “Adults are more self-directed and have specific reasons for taking the course. Many have their own learning goals in mind and expect the instructor to help them achieve those goals. Activities and assignments should be relevant to the students’ immediate needs, rather than the deferred needs of traditional college-age students, and should contain options for customization” (Simonson et al., 2015, p. 116).

DEE would like the training to be instructional without overwhelming the learner; otherwise they are concerned that learners will not complete the course. The course must include a short learner orientation module to assist the user in their new role as student. The proposed course content will present strategies for community building, learner engagement, learner communication, and course improvement and problem solutions. Additional resources including technology tools will be provided in a webliography area. During the analysis phase, the determination will be made whether to include all four topics (community building, learner engagement, learner communications, issues, and solutions) in one course or if the learner would be better served by dividing the content into two or more courses. The course(s) will include learner self-assessment tools to measure learning. Upon completion, the learner will receive a Certificate of Completion.

Logistics

The total length of the course will be 1-2 hours to acknowledge the time constraints of the target audience. The course will be created using Adobe Captivate modules presented in a Learning Management System. The course will be uploaded to the University of Idaho Blackboard Learning Management System (UIIdaho BbLearn) and administered by the DEE Staff. DEE would like to implement the training module prior to the start of the Fall 2017 semester in August.

References

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